

A number of factors contribute to why people continue to drink and drive. A person might underestimate the amount of alcohol they have consumed. They might overestimate their ability to drive while intoxicated. Maybe a person simply chooses to drink and drive because they think they can get away with it. In the case of a former friend, that is what he believed. My friend Daniel thought it was a statistical anomaly. He simply thought he would never be caught.

At one point in my life, I had been a bartender. I had seen plenty of people taking a chance on drinking and driving for whatever reason. You do what you can to be responsible in that kind of profession, but there is a limit to how much control a person has over another. You can try to get their keys, call for a ride on their behalf, cut them off, or outright refuse service, but there are simply limits and circumstances beyond anything you can do. Fortunately, I never had to experience any negative consequences first hand.

I lived in Fort Collins, Colorado for a while and my job at the time was being a project manager for a custom interiors company. I became fast friends with Daniel, one of our design engineers. We had a lot in common. One was a love for camping and hiking. Daniel and his brother were both very much into the outdoor life, as we liked to call it. Almost every trip we planned involved the two of them getting together to organize and pack their gear for the upcoming weekend. More often than not, they liked to drink a bit at one or the other's home while doing that.

One weekend, the two brothers decided to go on a trip alone. I had to work on that upcoming Saturday, so I was not available to tag along. When I arrived at work at 6:00 a.m. that morning, the owner's son came right up to me and said Daniel had been in a car accident the night before. I was shocked and concerned, but he did not have any details to offer. Later that day, I found out that he was under arrest for driving under the influence with charges pending for vehicular homicide.

Fort Collins is a college town. It is home to Colorado State University and Front Range Community College, so there are a substantial number of college-aged residents. Quite a lot of them ride motorcycles. Sport bikes are very popular, and many of them are first-time riders. That year, Larimer County had a significant number of motorcycle accidents and Daniel became involved in one that Friday night.

After they had finished loading Daniel's Nissan Xterra and consumed any number of beers depending upon whom you ask, Daniel decided to drive a short distance home. It was barely half a mile so he never gave it a thought. As he turned left onto his road leading into his apartment complex, a rider on a sport bike collided into the passenger side rear of his vehicle. The impact threw Chris over his handlebars, head first into the back of the Nissan, and sent him into the opposing lane where he was struck again by a mini-van a short distance behind. He died instantly.

When I eventually saw Daniel about a week later, he gave me his version of what happened. Apparently, the rider of the motorcycle was determined to be speeding upwards of 70 miles per hour, never braked or maneuvered. Regardless of those circumstances, Colorado uses proximate cause to determine the underlying factor contributing to negligence. As a result, he was facing vehicular homicide charges.

The initial results of the investigation showed that Daniel had a blood alcohol level almost three times the legal limit. One of the accident scene photos provided through disclosure showed one of the officers holding a motorcycle helmet against the metal part of the vehicle where the impact occurred. It was like holding two puzzle pieces side-by-side. Another picture showed the victim lying in the street. I could barely recognize the presence of a face. There was so much blood. It is a vision that almost haunts you to the point you wish you could go back and *not* see it.

The prosecutor offered Daniel a plea bargain in exchange for a felony manslaughter conviction of about 6 months. He rejected that deal and decided to fight the charges altogether. His retired father leveraged almost every asset he had to help with his defense. I guess that is what almost any parent would do. Daniel eventually lost his case; sentenced to 4-6 years in a state correctional facility. He served just over 4 years and is now a convicted felon. His father is broke. His brother does not want to have a relationship with him. The mother of the motorcycle rider has devoted the rest of her life and resources to pursuing every civil action available. Daniel's life is essentially over and finished. The last time I spoke with him, he was still in bitter denial. As much as you want to be supportive of a friend in a situation like that, it is almost impossible when they cannot take any responsibility.

That is the story I resort to telling someone when I think they even *might* drink and drive. It sounds blunt and maybe I am not as much fun at parties as I used to be, but I will ruin the moment if I have to. Because reassurances about giving them a ride beforehand rarely works. Offering a couch to sleep on is always blown off well before the drinking starts. Instead, I resort to the horror story and verbal slap to the face. That is usually when they take the spot on the couch for the night, no matter how uncomfortable it might be.